

UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

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An Educational Group

IF EVER I HAD an obsession in Dance it was to make it reflect my own folk background - certainly not a theatrical one to be sure - but a very specific and tangible one - one desperately needed (I felt) in choreography. So much that I have seen has been artificial - insecure and uninspired in Dance.

With this in mind this issue is to be dedicated to my own Father - ANGUS - for Father's Day. He died in January of 1960 in Helena, Montana and as I walked away from his grave I felt that a great part of myself was a legacy from him.

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ANGUS, as he was familiarly known to everyone, was born August 21st in 1874, on a farm near the small town of Shakopee, Minnesota. He spoke little of his youth other than that he had worked hard on the family farm with his brothers and sisters. His Mother, Martha Salmoni, came from New York and was born around 1830. His Father, Alexander Cameron was born in South Finch, Ontario, Canada about 1826. In their collective backgrounds were the family names of Bradshaw, Salmoni, McIntyre and Cameron. Angus preferred to be known as a Scotsman, but it is evident that there were English, and Italians in his background.

Schooling at this time was not the best and especially in the rural areas where it was difficult to get competent teachers. He did manage to get through the seventh grade. During his school years he had become highly interested in the letters from his Uncles, Sandy and Angus. Both men were pioneers in Montana and had prospected there since the early 60's, finding and losing several fortunes in the gold mines. About 1865 they had each taken up adjoining homesteads where they each built a one room log cabin to winter in when they were not prospecting. These two homesteads faced each other adjoined by a mile long beaver-made meadow, which was a versicolor garden of flowers and grasses changing with the seasons.

Both Uncles had written and were anxious to have young Angus come to visit them, possibly to

stay. The area was still very primitive and the west was thought to be the best place for a young man without education or wealth to carve a place for himself. It was understood that one should not be afraid to work or withstand hardship, but this was no problem for Angus - that was the history of the Cameron family on the American continent.

Tempted as he was, it was not until the spring of 1895, much to the distress of Martha, he boarded the train at Minneapolis for the long, slow trek across the plains to his future home in Montana. He had just become of age and could supposedly choose his own destiny. The picture of health, ruddy out-of-door complexion, clear blue eyes and jet black hair, he was dressed in his best new suit and carried a valise with the bare essentials for creature comforts. The family parting must have been a tearful one, for it was to be a very long time before he could return home to visit his family again.

After his arrival in Montana there was a blank period when little was known of his activities. But we can suppose that he spent some time batching with old Angus for a while and then with Sandy. Both men were actually not the most social men, so there must have been lonely moments living with these two hermits. As he was a nature lover, he no doubt found much to do wandering through the fields and mountains with a rifle over his shoulder for protection if needed. Game was one of their staple foods, but at no time would they kill more than needed to supply their wants.

When spring brought milder weather, young Angus would go with his Uncles to their mines on the western slopes of Mount Stonewall. These jaunts were on foot, leading the horse with their provisions strapped to his back. From their homestead cabins to their dirt floor cabin on the mountain was about fifteen miles, yet, would take the better part of the day to arrive there.

With no roads at the time, they had to ford the Blackfoot river, which was usually treacherous with the spring thaws. Then over the sagebrush benchlands where rabbits and smaller life abounded, into

the low foothills over fallen timber which impeded their progress/ Lynx, wolves and coyotes were prevalent living off the smaller animals by occasional forays to the benchlands. A gun over the shoulder gave one a comfortable feeling of security. When they came to Keep-Cook Creek, as it rushed down the mountainside, about noon, their real climb began. From then on the walking was hazardous over fallen rock, through dense underbrush, slippery patches of ice and snow where the sun did not reach. Occasionally stopping for a rest to look back over the valley gave them a feeling of exhilaration and well being and the strength to continue the climb. By four o'clock the cabin would be in sight and they would arrive there in time to prepare for the first night on the mountain; gathering wood for fires, clearing the cabin of rodents that had used the place as a winter home, and cutting fresh pine boughs for the beds and preparing their crude meal over the fire in the center of the floor.

The log cabin was crudely built into the side of the mountain and was about 12 X 16 with two small windows covered with oiled paper instead of glass. Two wooden beds built against the wall with pine boughs for a mattress and furs for covers. A home made table with a stool also against the wall. A makeshift oven was in the center of the room on the dirt floor. The only thing of beauty was the view of the valley below from the door to the outside.

Next morning, the sun would hit the mountain-side earlier than it did in the valley, as the Uncles prepared for their first day on their claims. Angus, none too interested in this kind of work, did help them for that summer making a lake for the water supply to wash the gold ore, building sluices, and the actual digging for the ore. Knowing him later, as my Father, and understanding him I knew his greatest pleasure must have been the out of doors, fishing in the stream, studying the wild flowers, fruits, grasses, and the bird and animal life. He loved animals and birds and was one of those rare human beings who had a special way with them. Being essentially a kind man, animals sensed this and knew him as their friend.

By fall, Angus decided not to winter in the valley, bidding his Uncles goodbye for a time he went by horseback to Helene, some sixty miles distant. He found employment in a grocery store and in two years he was taken into the business as a partner. His pleasant and friendly manner in dealing with the public soon won him many friends and his business prospered. Between 1896 and 1910 the business had changed from Cameron & Prosser to

Edwards & Cameron, and finally into a large department store known as the Fair Annex. This flourished, until the depressions after the First World War. Due to his generous and trusting nature he found himself with everyone owing him great sums of money and he was not able to pay his own bills. The Fair Annex went into bankruptcy.

In the early spring of 1901 Angus met and courted Rose Ann Hodge and before he knew it he was a married man at 28 with a bride of 18. In July of 1903 their first child was born and it was a happy event to be repeated biennially until six children had been born, five boys and a girl who died at birth.

During the years of the Fair Annex both Uncles had passed away and had left Angus all their property. With the demise of the store the family moved on to old Angus's place and lived for the first winter in a one room cabin under considerable hardship. A wood floor was built in a tent adjoining the cabin where the children slept for two winters (temperatures often as low as 45 degrees below zero). A new home was in the process of being built but most of Angus's time was taken up with the work of eking out a living at work he was unaccustomed to doing. He encouraged his boys to raise poultry, to garden and berry picking. Fishing and hunting further supplemented the family larder.

Angus and Rose became a popular couple in the community and the Saturday night dances became a regular occurrence, getting home Sunday morning in time to milk and feed the cows. Occasional progressive parties, barbecues, rodeos and Huckleberry parties were the only other diversions. In time, Rose became bored being a rancher's wife and began to seek more outside company which all led in the end to her deserting Angus and her five boys for a cowboy who promised her a life of ease and comfort. Angus took it bitterly and a few years later when she returned to a neighboring farm in hopes of seeing the boys, Angus was perched on the dividing fence with a shotgun to prevent it.

Until all the boys had grown Angus was Mother and Father both, cooking meals, getting them off to school and attending all the ranch chores besides. Years later he remarried, Jenny, a lovely lady his own age and they had many happy days together until she died of a complication of disease.

As a father he was extremely kind and knowing (even if uneducated in the period-spent-in-school-sense) and he stressed in his advice to his boys the love of nature. He had no greater pleasure than that of seeing a seed grown in the ground and waiting for

